

Climate crisis will affect Canada, too

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Body

Last Friday, a few hundred people gathered in front of the Ontario legislature to march for climate justice. The protest in Toronto was part of an annual global mobilization organized by "Fridays for Future" youth around the world.

A year ago, I stood among more than 50,000 protesters in front of the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin. This year, as I joined the protesters in Canada, my German friends again found themselves surrounded by tens of thousands of people. Toronto is a slightly smaller city than Berlin (although the skyscrapers and transit times often make me feel otherwise), but the difference in turnout is striking still.

The protests in Toronto and Berlin were only two of around 450 protests in the Global Climate Strike. From Bangladesh to Mexico and from Norway to South Africa, people take their protest signs to the streets and call on their governments to act against climate change.

The Fridays for Future movement was started by Greta Thunberg, who in 2018 decided to strike from school every Friday until the Swedish government would take real climate action. In the years following, more and more children have traded their books for banners and stirred action around the world.

In Berlin, climate strike days make the city tremble. The subways are filled with young people carrying pieces of cardboard. In the city centre, everyone seems to gravitate in the same direction: towards the parliament. As a child of the climate change generation, these days have filled me with hope and optimism.

In Canada, on the other hand, I felt part of a small group of radicals and tree huggers. As we marched along Yonge Street, people paused their shopping sprees to watch us with a mix of amusement and surprise. They seemed not unsympathetic to our concerns, but not much affected either. This was not their march, not their fight to get involved in.

But it should be. The climate crisis should concern Canadians as much as it does Germans - if not more. Canada is among the Top 10 countries historically responsible for global warming. Even decades after learning about the disastrous course we have put ourselves on, the ship has not been turned.

While the federal government has set a target for 2030 to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 40 per cent compared to 2005, emissions have stagnated at the same high levels. The Canadian oil and gas industry is still one of the largest in the world, supported by billions of taxpayer dollars.

And as fossil fuels keep being pumped out of Canadian soil, the consequences of Canadian inaction are felt around the world as well as at home. This summer, over a thousand people in British Columbia had to evacuate their homes due to wildfires, 32 million people in Pakistan were displaced by floods, and dozens of people died in

landslides in Uganda. These natural disasters will only become more frequent as the climate rapidly changes. Canada, as one of the biggest instigators of this crisis, has a key role to play.

As one of many newcomers to this country, the seeming apathy has caught me by surprise. You are the country of peacekeepers, of the Montreal Protocol, the country that liberated my European hometown in the Second World War.

Please be the country that holds your government accountable for the damage it is doing to our planet. You showed it was possible when more than 15,000 people marched in Toronto before the pandemic. Now that restrictions have been lifted and normalcy has largely returned, it is time to take back to those streets and acknowledge this crisis as your own.

Jana Elbrecht is a researcher and climate justice advocate from the Netherlands. She recently moved to Toronto.

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